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The Artist: An Unexpected Journey

The Artist: An Unexpected Journey

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts in Drama

by

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University of South Carolina Aiken
Bachelor of Arts in Fine Arts 2011

May 2015
University of Arkansas

This thesis is approved for recommendation to the Graduate Council.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is an effort to better understand the process of an actor. It contains documentation of my thesis performance along with materials such as a statement of artistry, my current headshot, an up to date resume, and a link to my professional website.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Special thanks to:

The Shipman clan for putting up with me while on this journey.

Amy Herzberg for going to bat for me, so that I might take this journey.

Dewey Scott-Wiley for starting it all and getting me my first job.

My fellow classmates, thank you my palookas.

Department of Fine Arts staff and faculty at the University of South Carolina Aiken.

Department of Theatre staff and faculty at the University of Arkansas.

The folks from The Warehouse Theatre for convincing me to take this journey.

DEDICATION

This is dedicated to:

My current, past and future tender comrades. We walk among the shaman.

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STATEMENT OF ARTISTRY

An artist has a responsibility to enliven hearts, enrich cultures, entertain the masses and raise the level of awareness within a society. As I enter the technical rehearsals of my final role at the University of Arkansas: Yermolai Alekseeich Lopakhin in Anton Chekov's *The Cherry Orchard*, as translated by Tom Stoppard, I find myself awakened by the journey of the theatre-maker. I consider myself as such, an individual artist that doesn't take from the form, but rather gives over to it in whatever way necessary. I have been fortunate enough to act, direct, write, design, and stage manage in my time at the University of Arkansas. All of these experiences have led me down a salient rabbit hole of true artistic comprehension.

"Mankind is advancing" is uttered more than once by the same character in *The Cherry Orchard*, as translated by Tom Stoppard. The character, Trofimov, is a perpetual student and an adversary of Lopakhin's, the two of them representing the divergent ideals in Russia's future, Marxism versus Capitalism. Whenever beginning a process I mine through the script for these repetitious devices, especially when spoken to or about my character. In this particular case, using the script as a blueprint, it becomes abundantly clear that 'where mankind is advancing to' is the major wrinkle in the relationship between Lopakhin and Trofimov. It is essential for an actor to be aware of the symbol they represent, without overtly signifying the symbol, because this increases effectiveness in storytelling. By being aware of the bigger picture one can help

give rise to moments of ideological conflict, social examination, and everything that is bigger than us.

Theatre is where all art forms meet, and there is no bigger treat than to be a person living within that world when things begin to collide. It is a kind of 'big bang' experience, where the entire universe is at stake, and an audience can experience true creation and catharsis. I am reminded of the shaman providing medicine for the soul, raising a society's level of awareness of the goods and evils in the world, and curing unidentifiable ailments through artistic, ritualistic expression and involvement. Theatre-makers pursue a paralleled goal, an endeavor to share something bigger than ourselves so that we may better understand ourselves. The affinity I have for pursuing and giving to something bigger than myself can only be measured by how often my heart explodes with grief, hope, rage, ecstasy, revolution, and inextinguishable love. For there exists no tangible rhyme or reason for this, only the intangible beauty of pursuing and giving. It is beautiful in that it gives back to you the more you give to it. That cyclical nature is the reason this relationship has such a longevity.

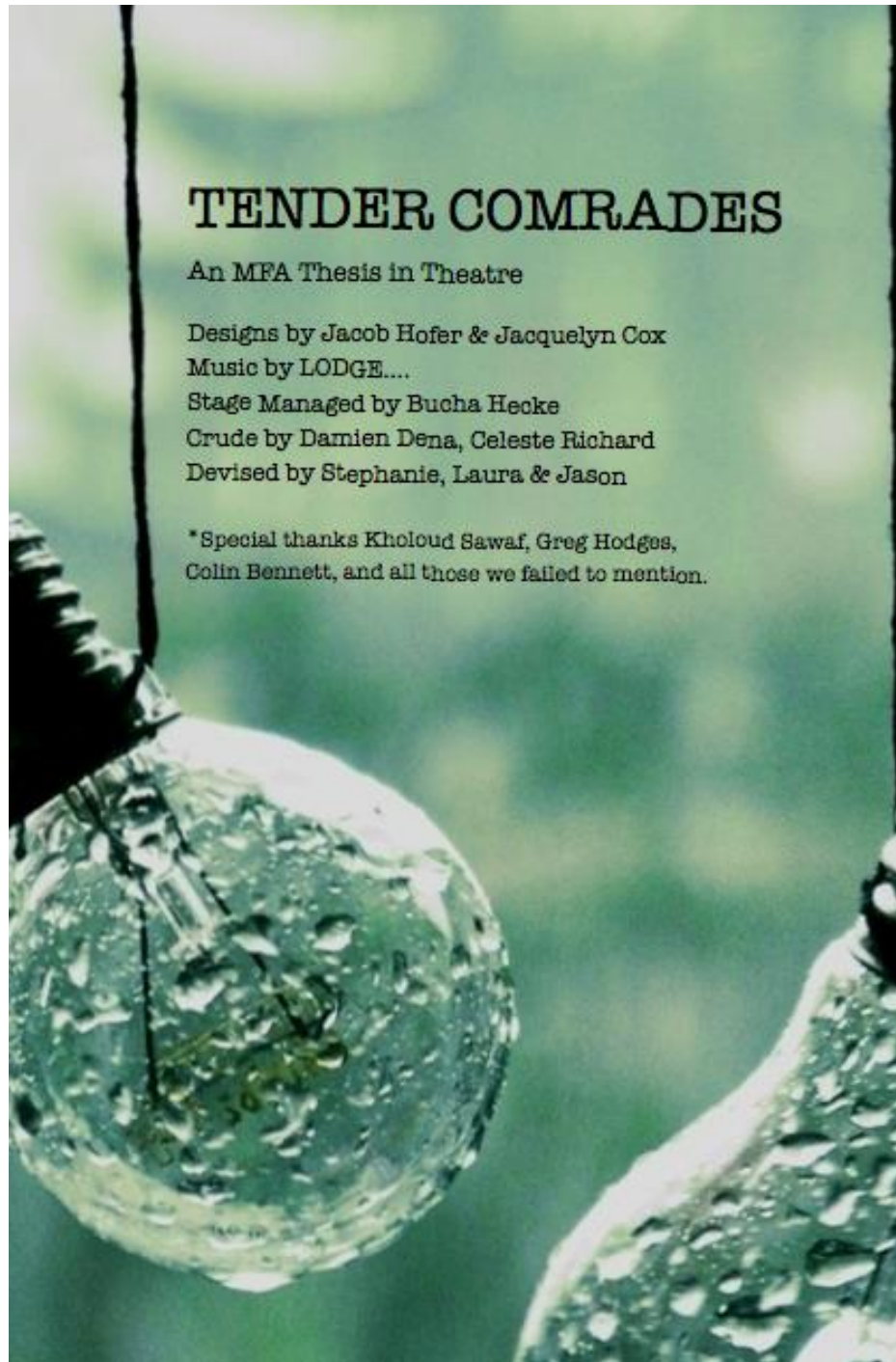
Acting is a life art, meaning one never fully masters the craft and constantly works to improve, and sustain, their instrument. An actors' canvas is the human soul. An actors' tools are the mind, body, and voice. Actors show the audience how to be brave, how to pursue what they want, how to grieve, how to live not in the shadows but in the light, to experience life in full form. To encounter all of the possibilities and impossibilities, to realize one's life is one's own creation, acting can put the power back in the hands of the under privileged and storytelling can teach what the next step is. Of course this can only be accomplished by a successful and

cultivating journey. I am constantly reminded of that old adage “It’s not about where you’re going, but how you get there.” During my three years of intense study I have witnessed and felt a lifetime of travels all connected to the sharing and exploring of the human condition.

Tender Comrades, an original piece conceived and performed by Stephanie Bignault, Laura Shatkus, and myself was the first time I’d ever ventured to create a performance piece from complete scratch, completely independent from a producing agent. It truly was an apex in my graduate studies at the University of Arkansas. This piece literally combined all three years of training that the three of us shared, from resonating pieces of advice given by faculty members to profound technique exploration. It was our mission to apply everything we learned in graduate school to a story whose trajectory was geared towards embarking on the next big adventure, real life. That was the biggest need in all three of our hearts, answering the question of what do we do next? This brings me back to Trofimov’s quote, “Mankind is advancing”, and the potentiality of where I’ll be and what I’ll be doing is as salient as that first rabbit hole.

I am humbled by the notion that I can, and have, given over to something bigger than myself. I am inspired by the tribe elder or shaman that first wore the animal hide to better illustrate the tale of the hunt. The need to enhance and enrich the sharing of the human condition, to better tell the community how bravery begets survival. Opening the hearts and minds of an audience is a social responsibility and necessity. I am moved by my peers and mentors. I’m very lucky to have unexpectedly journeyed to the land of the shaman.

TENDER COMRADES PRODUCTION PROGRAM



Program Designed by Jason Shipman

TENDER COMRADES SCRIPT

TENDER COMRADES

Written and devised by Stephanie Bignault, Jason Shipman and Laura Shatkus

The room is a bar, The Nines. It's a Quonset hut that looks like a bomb shelter. The playing space consists of a door to the exterior, center, a piano at left, a typewriter on a small table at right, 3 chairs and a mannequin wearing a small apron. There is a suitcase on legs on its side at left and a door to a hallway at right. There is a Ghost Light, not on, rolled over to the right as well. Cranes hang from strings, articles about Michael Keaton, hanging pages of music. A decorated jail of sorts.

The audience mingles, drinks wine, snacks, chats. The actors are not present. CHRIS and DAMIAN escort audience members to their seats. At the start of play, The Ghost Light turns on.

LAURA enters the space. She swings the hanging lights, plays a few notes on the piano. She has the room to herself and it's heaven.

LAURA

(To herself). What a to-do to die today, at a minute or two to two;
a thing distinctly hard to say, but harder still to do.
What a to-do to die today, at a minute or two to two;
a thing distinctly hard to say, but harder still to do.
What a to-do to die today, at a minute or two to two;

She swigs whiskey.

a thing distinctly hard to say, but harder still to do.

A magical Magic 8 Ball rolls in from the audience. She examines it. She shakes it. She turns over the magical Magic 8 Ball and, miraculously, it has an answer.

LAURA

“Keep your eyes on the stars and your feet on the ground.”—Theodore Roosevelt. Isn't that a Pixies lyric? Will I ever get out of here? *(Shakes, flips, reads.)* “Be where your feet are.”—Anonymous. Why are you so obsessed with my feet? Will *they* ever get out of here? *(Shakes, flips, reads)* “No one can make you feel inferior without your consent.”—Eleanor Roosevelt.

JASON, in character as KONSTANTIN from Anton Chekhov's The Seagull, enters from the hallway area. LAURA hides the magical Magic 8 Ball in her clothing. She will eventually play the part of MASHA from The Seagull.

JASON as KONSTANTIN

(To LAURA as MASHA) “It’s time. We’ve got to call the audience!”¹ (She doesn’t respond). I said, we’ve got to call the audience.”

LAURA as MASHA

(Reluctantly. To no one.) “The play’s about to start.”

JASON as KONSTANTIN

(To an imaginary audience and LAURA as MASHA.). “So here’s our theatre. (He arranges the space as he sees fit.) An empty space. No phony scenery or anything like that. (re: *The Door*) Just the lake in the background and the horizon.”

JASON and LAURA look to the door. STEPHANIE has missed her exit.

JASON as KONSTANTIN

I said...”Just the lake in the background and the horizon.”

STEPHANIE as NINA

(Entering from hallway area. Wearing a ridiculous, childish tulle skirt and carrying a handful of cranes wrapped in fabric). “Am I late? I’m not late. Am I late? Surely, I’m not late. (She drops the cranes and papers everywhere). I’ve been shaking all day. I got here as fast as I could. HA! I’m so glad to see you. I have to leave in half an hour, we have to hurry.” (She hugs JASON as KONSTANTIN. They adlib about her costume. Her ridiculous skirt gets cut. She hands LAURA a copy of *On The Road*) Can you just read my lines? I’m not off book yet.

LAURA

Again?

STEPHANIE

Come on!

JASON as KONSTANTIN

“Get to places! (STEPHANIE throws the “script” at LAURA) It’s time to begin as a matter of fact. The moon is rising. (He turns on a light.) We’ve got to start the play.”

STEPHANIE as NINA warms up. LAURA as MASHA sits in the “audience.”

JASON as KONSTANTIN (...continued)

(He plays music on a CD player, something melodramatic and epic, Sigur Ros and cues the girls to begin all while enacting an absurd physical ritual). “Oh ancient mists. Oh shadows that hover and swirl tonight above this lake. Bring us sweet sleep so that our dreams may show us what we will be twice 10,000 years.” (Throughout, he gives silent direction like a stage mom.)

Nina drapes herself in fabric and begins an elaborate and ridiculous movement piece. She flaps her arms, throws cranes, etc. as the music builds and builds. It’s both ridiculous and beautiful.

¹ Note: The following scene within a scene is adapted from Anton Chekhov’s *The Seagull*.

LAURA as MASHA sits unimpressed. She takes cues and side coaching from JASON as KONSTANTIN as she reads.

LAURA as MASHA as NINA

“And for just a moment I had reached the point of ecstasy that I always wanted to reach, I could hear an indescribable seething roar which wasn't in my ear but everywhere and had nothing to do with sounds. I realized that I had died and been reborn numberless times but just didn't remember especially because the transitions from life to death and back to life are so ghostly easy, like falling asleep and waking up again a million times, the utter casualness and deep ignorance of it. And when I realized this, I felt a sweet, swinging bliss, like a big shot of heroin in the mainline vein; like a gulp of wine late in the afternoon and it made me shudder; my feet tingled and I thought I was going to die the very next moment. But I didn't die...”²

The music reaches a climax and STEPHANIE as NINA throws off the fabric she's had draped over her head during the above. She steps forward off of her chair and poses ridiculously. JASON as KONSTANTIN claps. STEPHANIE as NINA bows. LAURA as MASHA claps.

JASON as KONSTANTIN

“Thank you everyone for coming. Thanks so much. *(To Stephanie)* Absolutely delightful and so pretty.”

STEPHANIE hugs JASON and they palaver about the show. They are all “themselves” again. Laura crosses to the light, turns it off. Then to the music, disconnects it.

Pause. JASON and STEPHANIE stare at LAURA.

LAURA

How many actors does it take to screw in a light bulb?

JASON

I don't know. How many?

LAURA

I don't know either. I can't remember.

JASON

Whatever. Why don't you have another drink?

A stand-off. Eventually they all find separate corners and exist in space: LAURA drinks/plays piano, “The Entertainer.” JASON types. STEPHANIE folds cranes.

LAURA plays. JASON shushes her, types loudly. LAURA plays louder. JASON throws a paper ball at LAURA. LAURA throws it back.

² From On The Road by Jack Kerouac

STEPHANIE

(In an attempt to end the fight) One time...”a woman came up to me and said, ‘I’d like to poison your mind with wrong ideas that appeal to you, though I am not unkind.’ She looked at me, I looked at something written across her scalp and these are the words that it faintly said as I tried to call for help.”

JASON AND STEPHANIE

(Singing and dancing; they work on cheering LAURA up) “There’s only one thing that I know how to do well. And I’ve often been told that you only can do what you know how to do well and that’s be you. Be what you’re like. Be like yourself. And so I’m having a wonderful time but I’d rather be whistling in the dark. Whistling in the dark. Whistling. Whistling. Dark, dark, dark, dark. There’s only one thing that I know how to do well. And I’ve often been told that you only can do what you know how to do well and that’s be you. Be what you’re like. Be like yourself. And so I’m having a wonderful time but I’d rather be whistling in the dark. Whistling in the dark. Whistling. Whistling. Dark, dark, dark, dark.”³

LAURA

I just want to be alone for one. Second. Just one.

JASON

Of course. Poopy pants doesn’t wanna play.

LAURA

Poopy pants?

They go back to their activities. Eventually, JASON and STEPHANIE come up with a game: JASON types and STEPHANIE “interprets” what he’s writing, like a puppet. Or a robot.

STEPHANIE

(To LAURA. Like a marionette with a New York accent.) Get yer head outta the clouds, kid. Get hip to the scene. Get your mitts off the marbles before I stuff that mud-pipe down your mush.

LAURA

Why are you talking like that?

STEPHANIE

Whatdya talkin’ about, toots? I’m not makin’ this baloney up! Somethin’s got me, see? The sucker with the schnozzle poured a slug, but, before he could scam out, two shamuses showed him the shiv and said they could send him over. *STEPHANIE begins chasing LAURA around the room.* And tell your moll to hand over the mazuma!

JASON

(Typing.) Mazuma, mazuma, mazuma!

³ From “Whistling in the Dark” by They Might Be Giants’ album *Flood*.

LAURA throws a shot of whiskey on STEPHANIE.

LAURA

(During the following, JASON sneaks out). You need to build an ability to just be yourself and not be doing something. That's what these games are taking away, is the ability to just sit here. That's being a person. Because underneath everything in your life there is that thing, that empty—forever empty. That knowledge that it's all for nothing and that you're alone. It's down there. And sometimes when things clear away, you're not doing anything, and you start going, 'oh no, here it comes. That I'm alone.' It just starts to visit on you. Just this sadness. Life is tremendously sad, just by being in it... Sadness is poetic. You're lucky to live sad moments. Because when you let yourself feel sad, your body has antibodies, it has happiness that comes rushing in to meet the sadness. And I am grateful to feel sad because it is met with true, profound happiness.⁴ Stop. Be. Exist. Be where your feet are!

STEPHANIE

Are you alright?

LAURA

Yes. I'm great.

STEPHANIE

You're so spiky.

LAURA

I don't even know that means!

STEPHANIE

(Beginning a piece of poetry they've been writing together, she works to get LAURA on board. They've worked on choreography that LAURA reluctantly enacts with STEPHANIE)

Solitude and loneliness are brothers
but should never be mistaken for the same person.
With Solitude, there is an expedition...

LAURA

(Correcting her) Active mission.

STEPHANIE

That's right. An *active mission*.
An excavation to unearth the gems within your soul's soil,
a foraging through jungles of previously unexplored thoughts,
or even a gentle, easy drop of a fishing line,
a winding trail of questions stringing to that juicy bait that snags the coveted meal.
Or, sometimes Solitude invites you to waft upon a breeze of memories,
floating easily through your mind's reconstructions as a dream,

⁴ Adapted from a speech by Louis C.K. on *The Conan O'Brien Show*

inhaling forgotten scents and tasting the spices of past loves.

LAURA

(Playing along.)

Now: often within remembrance's pastime, a door creaks ajar,
and Loneliness steals its sly little body into the room.

He spreads his arms wide and gapes open his knee-deep jaw,
scratchily sucking in all the colors of your mind's world.

You blink in this familiar, yet shockingly desolate space.

Solitude sits down, suddenly tired.

LAURA makes STEPHANIE sit down. A new moment of writing:

The world has become as gaping as Loneliness's mouth,
as grey as a marshland in winter.

Then Loneliness meets your eyes and a fixation occurs.

It's narrow and expansive all at once.

"This is what it means to be alone."

STEPHANIE

If you can, grab hold of Solitude and whisk yourselves into another room.

Why stay with what empties you out?

LAURA

But sometimes, a sadness in those mesmerizing eyes will stop you short.

He is kindred in your sadness.

You both have a need for visiting.

And so you stay.

STEPHANIE

And you mourn.

LAURA

And eventually his jaw will ache and his mouth will dry out and he will seek another host.

STEPHANIE

Then perhaps you and Solitude will return to your escapades with fervor.

LAURA

However, the likeliest of ventures,

you will clasp Solitude close to your breast,

share a kiss,

and mutually fall into the heartiest of slumbers.

An alliance has been mended.

LAURA

I like it.

STEPHANIE

Yeah. Me too. It was different. I think it's really working.

LAURA

I need to tell you something... I found—

JASON storms in with typed copies of "Michael Keaton."

JASON

Guys! I wanna revisit Michael Keaton, I wanna revisit Michael Keaton. Here. Take a copy. Take a copy. Look at the changes at the end there. *(They read)*. Don't forget to get in sync with us after "my frame of reference." Here. I'm gonna go and then you follow.

They each take a chair, as they have rehearsed, Jason places The Ghost Light center. The girls study Jason as he begins. LAURA looks to STEPHANIE and mouths "I'll tell you later." Eventually they are speaking and moving in a "round." The lights shift towards the end as they stand on chairs.

JASON, LAURA AND STEPHANIE as MICHAEL KEATON

Westerns were always my favorite things when I was little. And it always bothered me when cowboys were too clean in movies, or when they wore their guns like they had an outfit on. It always worked better when a guy looked sweaty and smelly, I hadda believe, I hadda believe that.

Now. Wait. Okay. It has to be true. Really true. Real. I had a nose for it as a kid. I still try to. Over the years, I think, people—actors, writers, whatever—lose their frame of reference. Their frame of reference is based on somebody else who did this or did that. Performances. So it just becomes a reflection of what already works. Like a warm-up. And that's an invitation to be inauthentic. Everything becomes, you know, the work of somebody who did that before. Then somebody becomes a version of a version of a version./ *(The overlap begins here)* My frame of reference—and maybe I'm just lucky I grew up the way I did, when I did—it's taken from some guy on the street, or some guy I grew up with. I always wanted to be the version. You know, the thing.

And there weren't that many kids around. We'd play war, soldiers, fight in the woods, cowboys and Indians. So when we did these fights, they had to be true for me. I'd say, 'We have to have a little contact. We have to hit each other—I won't hurt you, you won't hurt me, but we gotta make contact, you know?' So I'd hit him. In the face. Bam. I swear.

But anyway, when he wanted to go, I'd say, 'No, no, no'—and here's how weird I was—I'd say, 'We have to do the previews of what we're doing tomorrow.' The trailer. My hand to God.⁵

The Ghost Light starts blinking in Morse Code.

STEPHANIE
The light!

JASON
Michael Keaton didn't say that.

LAURA
What light?

JASON
Come on guys, let's pick it back up.

STEPHANIE
The light! It's...flashing.

JASON
(*Looking at the scripts*). I didn't add any of this.

LAURA
Oh my god.

STEPHANIE
It's Morse Code!

JASON
It's not. It's not real. It can't be.

STEPHANIE
What if something's still out there?

LAURA
What if?

STEPHANIE
What if.

⁵ Adapted from "A Normal Day in the Unusual Life of Michael Keaton," *Esquire Magazine* by Tom Chiarella

STEPHANIE and JASON move around the light. It blinks again. They pull the chairs away and circle some more.

LAURA

I found something.

STEPHANIE

What do you mean?

LAURA

I found something. Or...it found me.

STEPHANIE

What?

LAURA

A Magic 8 Ball. A *magical* Magic 8 Ball.

STEPHANIE

Here?

LAURA

It just...rolled in front of me.

JASON

No it didn't that's a lie.

LAURA

It's not a lie.

JASON

That door hasn't opened in 3 years, there's no way a *magical* Magic 8 Ball has been down here all that time and you've only now just come across it, or rather it came across you. That's absurd.

LAURA

No, this is absurd. You're absurd.

STEPHANIE

(Trying to get the group back together)

"There's only one thing that I know how to do well. And I've often been told –

LAURA and JASON

Shut up!

JASON

You're making this up!

LAURA

I am not. Just because your worldview doesn't extend beyond the cardboard box you sleep on doesn't mean it doesn't exist.

JASON

My world is bigger than yours. I can get off my cardboard box.

LAURA

I can see past your cardboard box, my world is bigger than yours.

JASON

I can see through your wall, my world's bigger than yours.

LAURA

I can leave!

JASON

No you can't!

STEPHANIE

The light!

LAURA

You can only make me feel inferior if I let you.

JASON

Nobody's trying to make you feel inferior, but you can't just say you can leave. None of us can leave. It's too dangerous.

LAURA

That's the first time in 3 years I've heard you say that out loud.

JASON

What are you talking about, I say that all the time.

LAURA

(Overlapping) You're so full of shit.

STEPHANIE

(Overlapping) Which one of you knows Morse Code?

JASON

You are. You're obviously still drunk. And making things up.

LAURA

(Reveals the Magic 8 Ball.)

Proof.

JASON

That's not proof. Gimme three truths.

LAURA

I know this is real because it has 3 dimensions, I can touch it. With my fingers. And...it smells like a bar. Smell it. *(She holds the Magic 8 Ball under Jason's nose).*

LAURA

Touch it! How is that not proof? Here. Touch it. Ask it a question.

JASON

No. No...Fine. Fine. Are you...real? *(Shakes, flips, reads)*. ““Worrying is as effective as trying to solve an algebra equation by chewing bubble gum.”— Mary Schmich. Isn't that Baz Luhrman?

LAURA

Ask it another one!

JASON

How'd you get here? *(Shakes, flips, reads)* “It does not do to dwell on dreams and forget to live.” Albus Dumbledore. This thing has a sense of humor?

LAURA takes the magical Magic 8 Ball from JASON. STEPHANIE touches the light. They are both transfixed, like moths to flames.

STEPHANIE

Which one of you knows Morse Code?

JASON grabs The Ghost Light.

LAURA *(overlapping with JASON)*

I do. I know Morse Code.

JASON

I do. Gimme that.

JASON moves The Ghost Light back to the piano and begins to translate the blinks onto paper.

STEPHANIE and LAURA aside.

STEPHANIE

Fudgy Brownie.

LAURA
What.

STEPHANIE
Fudgy. Brownie. Ice cream.

LAURA
Ok. Ok. I see your Fudgy Brownie and raise you butter chicken from that Indian place on 4th street.

STEPHANIE
Ok. Ok. That's good. Now think: Indian restaurant. Followed by...a bubble bath in hot, soapy, lavender-scented water.

LAURA
AHHHHH! I miss baths!

LAURA (*singing quietly at first and then louder. Eventually STEPHANIE joins in.*)
La cucaracha, la cucaracha, (The cockroach, the cockroach,)
Da da da da da da (can't walk anymore)
porque da da da, porque da da da da (because it's lacking, because it doesn't have)
marihuana pa' fumar. (marijuana to smoke)

STEPHANIE AND LAURA
La cucaracha, la cucaracha, (The cockroach, the cockroach,)
ya no puede caminar (can't walk anymore)
porque le falta, porque no tiene (because it's lacking, because it doesn't have)
marihuana pa' fumar. (marijuana to smoke)

STEPHANIE and LAURA look at JASON. They attack him with tickles, wet willies, still singing.

JASON
Hey. Hey. Stop. Just stop. It's not real.

STEPHANIE
What?

JASON
Look it's gibberish. It's some freak electrical thing. It means nothing. It means nothing. Look.

STEPHANIE (*reads*)
Dw i ddim wedi dy weld ti ers sbel...⁶

⁶ Translates as: "Long time, no see" in Welsh.

LAURA

That can't be right. Let me try. Give me the pencil.

JASON

You don't know Morse Code.

LAURA

You don't know my life.

LAURA goes to The Ghost Light, translates.

STEPHANIE

It's an anagram or something. I'll work on it.

JASON

It's bullshit.

STEPHANIE

It means something. It has to.

JASON

It's a thing, not what you intend the thing to mean.

STEPHANIE

Look. BEDDED-IDLED-WEIRDLY-SWIMS-WIT. Bedded idled weirdly swims wit!

STEPHANIE takes the paper to the ground.

JASON

Ok.

STEPHANIE

No. Ok. It's a code.

JASON

It's not a code. It's just the result of deteriorating wires. It means. Nothing. What if it all –

JASON grabs the paper from STEPHANIE, crumples it into a ball, throws it at the audience.

LAURA

Hey! Hey.

STEPHANIE

What.

LAURA

I got the same thing. It's just on repeat. It means nothing.

JASON

See, nothing.

STEPHANIE

What if this is a message? And there's something happening. Out there. Right now.

JASON, somehow, destroys The Ghost Light.

LAURA

(Overlapping) What the fuck is wrong with you?

STEPHANIE

(Overlapping) My mother may be out there.

JASON

Little child, believing in bright and beautiful fairy tales.

STEPHANIE

Fairy tales? I believe in fairy tales? Yeah, okay. Why don't we talk about this life that we have here? This bright and beautiful life. Violent obsessions sometimes take over a person, right? For example, you may think day and night of nothing but the moon. I have such a moon. Day and night I am held in the grip of one besetting thought, I must play, I must play, I must play! As soon as we finish a game, or one of your scripts, then something compels me to experience another, and then a third, and then a fourth--I must entertain ceaselessly. It's like I'm on a treadmill. I hurry along from one story to the next, and can't help myself. Do you see anything bright and beautiful in that? But all this time, I cannot forget for an instant that an unfinished story is awaiting me. *(She touches the door, or references it in some way.)* Yet, here we are! And I hear my mortality calling, and so I go back to this and begin to play, play, play some more. I can't escape myself, and I feel like I'm consuming my life in this same, same version of a version of a version till I start thinking that all this praise and admiration must be a deception, that I'm fooling myself because they probably think I'm going insane. Playing is a pleasure to me, but no sooner does a performance close than it becomes odious; this is not who I was meant to be. I made a mistake in being here at all! To my dying day shall I hear you people say: "Delightful and pretty; delightful and pretty," and nothing more. So yes, forgive me if I am indulging yet another fairy tale notion, but maybe just maybe this really does mean something. ⁷

Beat. She picks up the pieces frantically, looks for a solution and starts working on it. She cries. A panic attack begins. She sits down on the floor to calm herself.

STEPHANIE *(sings quietly)*

If I had a boat

I'd go out on the ocean

⁷ Adapted from Anton Chekhov's, *The Seagull*.

And if I had a pony
I'd ride him on my boat/
And we could all together
Go out on the ocean
Me upon my pony on my boat

If I were Roy Rogers
I'd sure enough be single
I couldn't bring myself to marrying old Dale
It'd just be me and trigger
We'd go riding through them movies
Then we'd buy a boat and on the sea we'd sail

And if I had a boat
I'd go out on the ocean
And if I had a pony
I'd ride him on my boat
And we could all together
Go out on the ocean
Set me upon my pony on my boat
The mystery masked man was smart
He got himself a Tonto
'Cause Tonto did the dirty work for free
But Tonto he was smarter
And one day said kemo sabe
Kiss my ass I bought a boat
I'm going out to sea

And if I had a boat
I'd go out on the ocean
And if I had a pony
I'd ride him on my boat
And we could all together
Go out on the ocean
Me upon my pony on my boat

And if I were like lightning
I wouldn't need no sneakers
I'd come and go wherever I would please
And I'd scare 'em by the shade tree
And I'd scare 'em by the light pole
But I would not scare my pony on my boat out on the sea

And if I had a boat
I'd go out on the ocean
And if I had a pony

I'd ride him on my boat
And we could all together
Go out on the ocean
Me upon my pony on my boat⁸

LAURA
/What is she doing?

JASON
I don't know.

JASON and LAURA stare.

LAURA
I think she's having a panic attack again.

JASON
Ok.

LAURA
Ok?

JASON
Ok. I don't know what to do.

LAURA
Why don't you go get some water?

JASON
Ok. Ok.

STEPHANIE continues singing quietly.

LAURA stares at STEPHANIE. JASON returns with water. Tries to give it to STEPHANIE. She ignores him, gathering up the pieces of The Ghost Light. She exits, sings offstage.

LAURA
Why did you do that?

JASON
I'm trying to protect us. It's false hope.

LAURA

⁸ "If I Had A Boat"—Song/Lyrics by Lyle Lovett

It's not false hope. Something is happening. I can feel it. Here. Feel it. (*She holds the Magic 8 Ball out to him*).

During the following, LAURA bandages JASON's bleeding hand.

JASON

I don't want to go back. In here, I...*we* have everything we need. Whenever we start a new venture, there is some sort of short-term euphoria. Like I have 3 cracked ribs and I'm being asked if it hurts...I smile and can say that this is an 'interesting' way to live with what you got. I know I'm a strange person, and that a lot of conventional paths require more smarts, focus and common sense, that I am unable to summon. This life is a hustle, a prolonged improv. I love it, I'm addicted. To this world we've created. This is this world we've been given. This way of living has made me far more resourceful and bold than I ever thought I was capable of before...all this.

STEPHANIE re-enters with the broken pieces of The Ghost Light.

JASON (*cont...*)

(*He takes the Magical Magic 8 Ball from her*) You are my family. The only people I have, and the only people I will know for the rest of my life. I'm 31 I'm not going to meet anyone new. But what the fuck am I talking about. Look. After all these years, this is perhaps the best part of my existence. I can't retire from it.⁹

LAURA

(*Retrieving her Magical Magic 8 Ball. To Stephanie*). Are you ok?

STEPHANIE

(*Still teary-eyed*) I'm not thinking clearly. I can't figure it out.

LAURA

(*Comforting*) Come on. We'll ask the Ball.

LAURA and STEPHANIE exit.

JASON is alone. Beat. He pushes items in front of the door. He takes a piece of wood to hammer the wood over the window. He begins to exit to get more nails. STEPHANIE re-enters. A standoff between JASON and STEPHANIE. It's uncomfortable. Jason exits.

Off stage voices:

LAURA

What are you doing?

JASON

⁹ From *LA Weekly*, January 15th, 2015, "Henry Rollins: My Life Has Been A Hustle."

I'm looking for the nails.

LAURA

What. Why? Do you need nails?

JASON

I just do.

LAURA

What do you mean you just do? What are you doing?

JASON

Nothing.

LAURA

Nothing?

JASON

Yeah. Nothing. I'm doing nothing. Isn't that what you want us all to do?

LAURA

What? No... You're taking your box? Where are you going?

JASON

My world. Bigger than yours.

JASON re-enters. LAURA follows. They discover that STEPHANIE is undoing the deadbolt.

LAURA

Hey! HEY!

JASON

Woah woah woah woah woah. Take your hand off the doorknob.

They encircle her.

STEPHANIE

You guys don't have to do anything. I'm just... I'm going.

JASON

What are you gonna do out there.

STEPHANIE

I'm gonna buy a boat. I'm gonna find the others.

JASON

What others. This isn't *Lost*.

LAURA

Wait. Don't. Ask the ball. (*LAURA shoves the ball at STEPHANIE. STEPHANIE won't take the ball so LAURA asks/shakes/flips on her behalf. Should she leave by herself? (Shakes, flips, shows the answer to STEPHANIE)* Well? Read it.

STEPHANIE

"Change is inevitable. Except from a vending machine." –Robert Gallagher.

JASON

Who the hell is Robert Gallagher?

STEPHANIE

Let's just see it, for whatever it is now.

JASON

(*Overlapping*) No. No way.

LAURA

(*Overlapping*) Be where your feet are!

STEPHANIE opens the door. Light. And sound. The door yanks her back. All three battle the door. The door stays open, shaking, dancing with the three actors during an elaborate movement piece to sound. Their bodies are not their own.

Finally, the door shuts, the light and sound stops and they fall. Their bodies are their own again. A long moment. They stare at the door. All at once they have the same thought: move the chairs down center facing up center/the door. As if they are on guard. Does STEPHANIE grab her Seagull fabric and hide them all under it? Like children hiding from the monsters?

JASON

Guys. Are we stuck in an existential French film or something?

LAURA

(*She raises the magical Magic 8 Ball.*) The forecast is hazy.

JASON

Yeah. I'm a real boy. I ain't no spirit damned in purgatory.

STEPHANIE

Me neither.

LAURA

Me neither. (*Pronounced /nye-thur/, like the old song*)

STEPHANIE

Either.

LAURA (*singing*)

Either.

STEPHANIE (*singing*)

Neither.

LAURA (*singing*)

Neither.

JASON (*singing*)

Let's call the whole thing off.

A paper ball sails in from the audience. They scatter and chairs get pulled back to corners.

LAURA

What the fuck is that.

STEPHANIE

It's a paper ball.

JASON

Where did it come from?

STEPHANIE

I don't know.

They face the audience looking for the answer.

JASON

(Under his breath). I'm a real boy.

They all look back at the ball. Jason reaches for it.

STEPHANIE

Don't touch it.

JASON

It's just a piece of paper, man.

He throws it at STEPHANIE she throws it back.

He opens the paper: The sound of wind. He closes the paper: sound out.

JASON

The paper is making noise.

STEPHANIE

Do it again.

He hands the paper to her. She opens it: the sound of crickets.

LAURA

Let me try!

LAURA opens it: children laughing. She closes it.

Together, they all open the paper ball. The sound of T.S. Elliott reading "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock;" just first few lines of the poem "Let us go then...you and I...patient etherized upon the table." They close it. They open it again: They hear Ludacris: "Move bitch, get out the way." Together, they open the ball again: sound of the 5 grad actors and KHOLOUD talking, planning, laughing. They close the ball.

STEPHANIE

"It's time."

LAURA

"We've got to call the audience."

JASON

"The play's about to start."

They open the ball a final time and lay it on the floor: The song "Tender Comrades" sung by Billy Bragg. They collaboratively construct a beautiful piece of sculpture which will be left in space behind them. It contains all of their possessions: the typewriter, the flask, The Magical Magic 8 Ball, the remaining pieces of The Ghost Light, the mannequin wearing the ridiculous tulle skirt. When the sculpture is completed:

The door opens and each of them exits into light, going their separate ways. At the door, LAURA turns back, looks at the audience one final time then exits.

The door closes. Lights go down.

Beat.

The Ghost Light comes back on.

END OF PLAY

TENDER COMRADES PRODUCTION PHOTOS



Photos reprinted with the permission from photographer, Jacquelyn Ryan Cox

WEBSITE LINK

<http://shipman.mixform.com/>

HEADSHOT AND RESUME



Photo reprinted with permission from photographer, Mason Hankins

JASON M. SHIPMAN

REGIONAL

Miracle on South Division St.	Jimmy	Cortland Repertory Theatre	Nathaniel Shaw
Hamlet	Laertes (Hamlet US)	TheatreSquared	Sean Patrick Reilly
One Man, Two Guvnors	Francis US	TheatreSquared	Amy Herzberg
Disfarmer	Penrose/Company	Arkansas New Play Fest	Keira Fromm
Flamingo and Decatur	Jackson	Nadine Baum Studio Theatre	Amy Herzberg
The Architecture of Moshe Safdie	Jason	Artists Laboratory Theatre	Joseph Fletcher
The 39 Steps	Clown 1	Warehouse Theatre	Chip Egan
Hamlet	Hamlet	Warehouse Theatre	Paul Savas
Metamorphoses	Phaeton	Warehouse Theatre	Shannon Robert
The Elephant Man	Dr. Frederick Treves	Warehouse Theatre	Brian Haimmbach
Stones in his Pockets	Jake Quinn	Warehouse Theatre	Anne Tromsness
Almost, Maine	Company	Warehouse Theatre	Chip Egan
Three Cuckolds	Arrlechino	Warehouse Theatre	David Yeakle
Cloud Nine	Betty/Edward	Warehouse Theatre	Julie Rossman
Taming of the Shrew	Petruchio	Distracted Globe	Jayce Tromsness
Copy Man	Priest	Trustus Theatre	Dewey Scott-Wiley
Wax Work	Allen	Trustus Theatre	Dewey Scott-Wiley

ORIGINAL WORK

Tender Comrades	Jason w/ Glasses	The Nines Lounge	Laura Stephanie Sawaf
Just North of Whoville	Jason w/ Coffee	University of Arkansas	Michael Landman
5 Months Pregnant	Jason w/ Improv	Common Grounds	Arianne Ellison

UNIVERSITY

The Cherry Orchard	Lopakhin	University of Arkansas	Kate Frank
Kin	Sean	University of Arkansas	Amy Herzberg
Spring Awakening	Adult Man	University of Arkansas	Shana Gold
She Stoops to Conquer	Mr. Hardcastle	University of Arkansas	Michael Landman
A Doll's House	Torvald	University of Arkansas	Kholoud Sawaf
33 Variations	Mike	University of Arkansas	Amy Herzberg
The Clean House (KC/ACTF Selection)	Charles	USC-Aiken	Dewey Scott-Wiley

FILM

Emmeline Muffet	Lead	Lune Bateaux Pictures	Stephen Boatright
Neopolitan	Featured	130K Frames	Todd Mattson

TRAINING

Meisner Technique	Amy Herzberg, Bob Ford
Viewpoints	Michael Landman
Voice and Speech	Mavourneen Dwyer
Long-form Improv	Kris Stoker
Warehouse Theatre	Journeyman Training Program
SAFD Certification (Hand & Quarterstaff) exp.	Robert Ek

EDUCATION

University of Arkansas; MFA in Acting Candidate (graduation 2015)
 University of South Carolina in Aiken; BA in Fine Arts; Minor in Anthropology and Human Geography

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APPENDIX A.1

Email Correspondence with Laura Shatkus and Stephanie Bignault

*Jason
Shipman*

Apr 9 (2 days ago)

to Stephanie, Laura

Hey peeps,

I'm also including the Tender Comrades script in my thesis materials and need written permission from for these purposes.

Thanks!



*Laura
Shatkus*

Apr 9 (2 days ago)

to me, Stephanie

You may have my permission to use my name on the Tender Comrades script!

Stephanie Bignault

11:10 PM (5 minutes ago)

to Jason

Hello Jason,

You absolutely have my permission to cite me as a co-author for Tender Comrades, our group thesis project.
Thanks!

APPENDIX A.2

Email Correspondence with Mason Hankins



Jason Shipman

10:22 PM (21 hours ago)

to Mason

Hey Mason!

Hope the real world is being gentle and cultivating for you!

I'm in the midst of completing my thesis materials and would like to use that headshot you took of me during She Stoops to Conquer. Do you mind granting me approval?

Thanks buddy!
Jason

Sent from my iPhone



Mason Hankins 6:19 AM (13 hours ago)

to me

Sure anything you need Jason.

APPENDIX A.3

Email correspondence with Jacquelyn Ryan Cox

1 of 4,505

Photo permission

Inbox x



Jason Shipman

10:17 PM (5 minutes ago)

to Jacquelyn

Hi Jacquelyn,
May I have your permission to use 2 production stills you took of Tender Comrades in my thesis?

Best wishes,

Jason



Jacquelyn Cox

10:21 PM (1 minute ago)

to me

Jason,

You're welcome to any photos I took!

Thank you!

Sent from my iPhone